ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE EVIDENCE FOR THE PREHISTORIC DEVELOPMENT OF ESKIMO CULTURE: AN ASSESSMENT

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ABSTRACT

Differing views of scholars concerning Eskimo origins and the prehistoric development of Eskimo culture are presented, and an attempt is made to assess the degree to which the artifactual evidence fits each particular view. With this aim, an outline of the archaeological complexes in question is given and the interrelations of various arctic traditions discussed. Population and linguistic interpretations are differentiated from technological ones and indications given as to what kind of inferences justly can be drawn from the evidence we have.

INTRODUCTION

The prehistoric development of Eskimo culture has been a subject of continuing interest for years. Each decade of archaeological excavation has brought to light new discoveries, and our understanding of local sequences throughout the Arctic is steadily growing. We are at the point where we no longer need to rely on linking archaeological assemblages or artifact styles through time and space by the once common appeal to "cultural survivals" or correspondences in widely separated areas, and instead can now usually find contemporaneous counterparts in neighboring archaeological sequences. Despite these advances, disagreement continues on even the most basic outline of Eskimo cultural development. Much of this disagreement, I believe, is a result of the investigators' different theoretical viewpoints which temper the kinds of analyses they attempt and the conclusions they propound. It seems to me that most of the conflicting views, where they are based on detailed data, cannot be disproved by those who accept the premises on which they were founded, rather, they can only be countered by those who accept another set of premises.

For example, in reviewing the writings by arctic archaeologists of the last two decades, I find that several influential scholars feel comfortable in utilizing archaeological data to make conclusions about racial (population) history; others see no apparent logical inconsistencies in utilizing present day linguistic distinctions as a framework for interpreting the entire span of arctic prehistory. Still others content themselves to make only cultural interpretations of artifactual materials, thereby precluding the opportunity of saying anything definitive about the origins of a population or a language from archaeological data except under some isolated, rigorously defined conditions that occur very rarely. One who accepts the premise that artifact styles—regardless of antiquity—are markers of linguistically and racially identifiable populations will make different conclusions from one who rejects such a premise.

In the following outline of the current thinking on the prehistoric development of Eskimo culture, I present views of scholars representing several types of theoretical stances. I shall attempt to assess the degree to which the artifactual evidence fits each particular view (i.e., the particular metaphor), e.g., population movement, linguistic spread, diffusion of ideas, that the archaeologist has chosen as a means of presenting his data.

THE SEQUENCES

Summarized below and in Fig. 1 is a brief outline of the archaeological complexes in question. Fig. 1 itself is a distillation of the various interpretive schemes as presented by those archaeologists who have been most active in the region, and includes my own interpretation of the archaeological
Fig. 1. Chronological Chart for the Western American Arctic (Based on Radiocarbon Dated Sequences).
relationships in northwestern Alaska.

The most recent of the archaeological traditions has been termed the Northern Maritime tradition (Collins 1954:91), characterized primarily by cultures adapted to arctic sea mammal hunting in open water and, where practicable, from fixed ice or an ice edge. Spanning the last two millennia, it contains the archaeological complexes known as Okvik, Old Dering Sea, Pumuk, Birmirk, and Thule, all of which exhibit rather clear relationships to each other. The next earlier tradition is the Arctic Small Tool tradition, defined by Irving (1957, 1968) on the basis of his and Giddings' collections of the Denbigh Flint complex in Alaska (Giddings 1949, 1967) and contemporaneous complexes of Independence I (Knuth 1954, 1967) and Pre-Dorset (Taylor 1962, 1968) in the eastern North American Arctic. Strictly speaking, it is comprised of only these three complexes (including Sargaq, the Greenland variant of Pre-Dorset), dating between about 4000 and 3000 B.P. ± 200 years (Irving 1968). However, I favor the inclusion in the west of such complexes as Choris (Giddings 1977), Norton (Giddings 1964) and Ipiutak (Larsen and Rainey 1948) and treat each as a phase within the tradition. Some archaeologists do not regard one or all three as Arctic Small Tool tradition, and Dumond (Dumond, Henn and Stuckenrath, n.d.) views Norton as a separate tradition, derived from the Arctic Small Tool tradition. For eastern Arctic North America I prefer to include all of the pre-Thule complexes—Independence II, and Dorset as well as Independence I, Pre-Dorset, and Sarqaq—in the Arctic Small Tool tradition, based on the continuity of artifact styles or types in successive complexes in the same general region. Other archaeologists, including some among those most active in the east consider the Arctic Small Tool tradition to be distinct from Pre-Dorset and any of the Dorset assemblages, a distinction based on their assessment of the differences in artifact complexes and styles (McOvie 1976).

Archaeological traditions in the southern part of Alaska (southwestern Alaska, the Alaska Peninsula, and the Aleutian Islands) include, first, the Aleut tradition, most thoroughly documented through the work of W. S. Laughlin (e.g., 1966). Other early traditions include Ocean Day (Clark 1976) and Kachemak (de Laguna 1934; Clark 1971:26) on the Pacific coast of the Alaska Peninsula and Cook Inlet, and several (termed "periods") along Brooks River and Naknek River drainages on the northern side of the Alaska Peninsula (Dumond 1971a). The earliest tradition to be discussed below, dated about 9000 to 10,000 years ago, is the American Paleo-Arctic, originally defined from complexes in northwestern Alaska (Anderson 1971a and b), but now reported in several other regions of Alaska (Dumond, Henn and Stuckenrath 1975).

ESKIMOS AND THE NORTHERN MARITIME TRADITION

The distribution of Eskimo language and culture from Greenland to Chukotka and from Labrador to the Pacific coast of Alaska Peninsula and adjacent areas during the historic era has been characterized as remarkably coincident: "No other primitive people anywhere in the world occupy so wide a territory and at the same time exhibit such remarkable uniformity of language, culture, and physical type" (Collins 1954:12). Although few archaeologists seriously question the "Eskimeness" of the people responsible for the Northern Maritime tradition, particularly since the hypothesis receives substantial support from physical anthropology, there are enough exceptions in the historic period to make the link of Eskimo race, language and culture of dubious utility as a guiding principle for interpreting Arctic archaeology. For example, where Eskimo and non-Eskimo (Indian) speakers live along different parts of the same river system there are commonly settlements in which a particular group is ethnically and linguistically one but materially the other (Townsend 1970). In other areas, even where there are more clear cut geographical boundaries between ethnic groups, Eskimo material culture is found as an important ingredient of the material culture of non-Eskimo groups, and vice versa (Morlan 1973, Clark 1974, Giddings 1952). These exceptions, of which there are many more, ought to serve as a warning to any archaeologist who feels no constraints about phrasing his archaeological findings in terms of such epiphenomena as language change or population (racial) movement—especially when he is considering the archaeology of different ecological zones and of great time depths. Without physiological and ethnohistorical information it is difficult enough to identify Eskimos historically—consider how much more difficult it is to identify them in prehistory. I see this difficulty as a critical obstacle to interpreting archaeological data racially or linguistically, but a full discourse on this subject would take us afield.

1The term culture is used throughout this paper to refer to the particular cluster of archaeological assemblages that characterizes a local complex. The geographical extent of a culture usually can be determined from the context of the paragraph.
Leaving this point aside, we encounter the first major area of contention about the development of Eskimo culture in discussions of the derivation of Birnirk culture. Decades ago, H. B. Collins described Birnirk as a specialized outgrowth of Old Bering Sea culture, which itself was the earliest widespread culture throughout St. Lawrence Island and coastal Chukotka (Collins 1917:372, 1964:98). Okvik was to Collins the earliest phase of the Old Bering Sea cultural period. Although other archaeologists have regarded Okvik as a distinct period, they have essentially agreed with Collins that Okvik, Old Bering Sea, and Birnirk (and Punuk) comprise a lineal succession in the development of a single tradition (Riddings 1960). However, within the last fifteen years Arutyunov and Dergeyev (1968) have presented a reasonable argument that Okvik and Old Bering Sea were ecologically distinct contemporaneous regional variants and that Birnirk was a northern outgrowth of Old Bering Sea, while Punuk was a more southerly outgrowth of Okvik. Dumond (1965:Fig. 7) has proposed that Birnirk developed from some kind of Norton base, perhaps in Norton Sound or in Seward Peninsula, but thus far, no archaeological indications of transitional Norton-Birnirk assemblages have been found. A fourth position, namely, that Birnirk developed in situ in northwestern Alaska, would have to take into account the immediately prior existence of Ipiutak, a stylistically unique culture located along the eastern shores of the Chukchi Sea and the interior of northwestern Alaska. Actually, two recent views have attempted to link Birnirk to Ipiutak, not only culturally, but by extension, also racially and linguistically (McGhee, n.d.; Clark 1976). The best evidence for this, not made explicit by either archaeologist, might be, first, the presence at Cape Krusenstern in northwestern Alaska of two 1200 to 1300 year ago Birnirk style houses that contained ground slate and curvilinear stamped pottery as well as Ipiutak style chipped stone artifacts; and, second, the presence of a few Ipiutak style chipped stone artifacts from other Birnirk sites as well (Ford 1959). Although the evidence of the concurrence of Birnirk and Ipiutak style artifacts in the Cape Krusenstern houses is clear, I do not believe that it demonstrates a transition at all, since in most sites Birnirk and Ipiutak materials are vastly different from each other. Rather, the direct sharing of ideas between peoples of the two cultures could have occurred, since the two coexisted for a time in the region (Anderson, n.d.). On the other hand, some of the so-called Ipiutak styles in Birnirk may have been derived from an earlier cultural period during which weapons in all northern cultures contained insets. Actually, most of the above views on the origins of Birnirk are not all that different from each other. That is, Okvik-Old Bering Sea complexes could be seen as but late Asian and island variants of a widespread tradition that also included Norton from Norton Sound and Southwestern Alaska (Dumond 1965) and Near-Ipiutak from the coast of northwestern Alaska (Tarsen and Mainey 1948), with each area manifesting a cultural variant adapted to local ecological conditions. The development that resulted in Birnirk could be viewed as the specific evolution of culture, along the northern shores of the entire region (plus the particularly good winter/spring sealing points to the south), that was stimulated by the improvement both of open water and, where practicable, of ice hunting techniques and equipment. Given the assumption—a valid one, I believe, since the distances are small and the people had the technical capability to travel widely—that contact among peoples in these areas was continual, one would expect to find in the same archaeological record both evidence for local development and evidence for the diffusion of traits from neighboring cultures. The interpretation of these findings as evidence for a continuity of population or for the immigration of a population would depend simply on one's predilection. To argue for one interpretation or the other would be to express an opinion—that is, of the number of outside influences vis à vis local developments which is sufficient to signal a population replacement. Since populations can be replaced with or without significant cultural change in the archaeological record (since local populations can exist with or without significant cultural change), and since language replacement can occur with or without population replacement, the unscrambling of these variables by archaeologists appears highly unlikely.

ARCTIC SMALL TOOL TRADITION AND SUCCEEDING COMPLEXES

The question of Eskimo development during the pre-Arctic Maritime period is interwoven with the study of the development of the Arctic Small Tool tradition. The Arctic Small Tool Tradition has long been thought to indicate Eskimo culture, a conclusion based both on the coincidence of territory covered by Arctic Small Tool Tradition sites and Eskimos, and on a whole complex of reasoning that follows from the original definition of Paleo-Eskimo culture and economy (Stecensby 1917). In recent years several questions concerning these conclusions have arisen.
First, I shall consider the derivation of the Arctic Small Tool tradition. For a long time the Denbigh Flint complex and the rest of the Arctic Small Tool tradition appeared to have arrived suddenly on the scene, with no trace of prior development anywhere. In the last decade, however, finds from the Belkachi site in the Aldan Region of Eastern Siberia have disclosed the existence of assemblages with numerous stylistic elements that most scholars feel must bear on the question of Denbigh Flint Complex ancestry (Mochanov 1969). These elements include bifacially flaked weapon end-blade insets, burins, microblades and some other specific categories of stone tools. To me the Belkachi burins and microblades and cores do not look sufficiently like Denbigh Flint Complex ones to make a case for any special historic connection; those two artifact categories are found earlier throughout Japan, northeastern Asia, and northern North America. However, the Belkachi insets, flaking style and treatment of such artifact types as endscrapers are so characteristic of the Denbigh Flint Complex that I think the connection is scarcely disputable. At least one archaeologist has interpreted this connection as evidence for the migration of the people responsible for the Arctic Small Tool tradition from the Aldan Region to Alaska during the millennium preceding the appearance of the Denbigh Flint Complex (Irving 1968). For those who accept the Arctic Small Tool tradition ancestry of Eskimos, the remote ancestors of Eskimos would therefore have been derived from eastern Siberia. Since we have so many gaps in the archaeological record, both in the Soviet Far East and Arctic Alaska, and since there can be so many different ways to account for the Belkachi-Denbigh Flint Complex similarities—even given an historical connection as fact—the hypothesis of a migration across several thousand miles during a 1000 or 2000 year period seems far-fetched. Further, increasing finds of early sites in northwestern Alaska with microblade and core technologies that at least developmentally appear to be intermediate between American Paleo-Arctic and the Arctic Small Tool tradition (Anderson 1972, Gal 1976) suggest the possibility that there was a continuous development of culture in Arctic Alaska during the millennia preceding the appearance of the Denbigh Flint Complex. To suggest such a continuity and at the same time to suggest the diffusion of specific artifact styles from Asia is not, or course, inconsistent.

A second set of questions regarding the role of the Arctic Small Tool tradition in the development of Eskimo culture pertains to the eastern part of the North American Arctic. Most work in the eastern Arctic has confirmed the initial appearance of the Arctic Small Tool tradition there some time around 4000 years ago. Apparently as a result of a rapid migration into unoccupied northern territories, the carriers of this tradition, of which Independence I (Knauth 1967) and Early Pre-Dorset (Maxwell 1976) were the earliest phases, began a long, essentially indigenous development of culture that resulted in such archaeological phases as Sargaq and Dorset in Greenland (Mathiassen 1958, Larsen and Meldgaard 1958) and Pre-Dorset and Dorset in Canada, with intermittent Arctic Small Tool tradition occupations of Labrador and Newfoundland. Because of great cultural similarities through time and space there has been little reason to challenge the scheme. Research efforts in the "core area" (that is, the region that includes "at least both shores of Hudson Strait, the islands at its western mouth, the vicinity of Fury and Hecla Strait, northern Baffin Island, and at least southern Bylot Island" (Maxwell 1976) have been largely directed toward detailing the nature of cultural change rather than the unraveling of racial and population histories (Meldgaard 1962). Here, Pre-Dorset and Independence I complexes are seen by most as regional variants of the same tradition (the Arctic Small Tool tradition). The study of indigenous developments and adjustments to local conditions (yet with widespread diffusion of new styles and technologies) has become the key to the study of Paleo-Eskimo history of the region prior to the introduction of Neo-Eskimo Thule culture.

In the peripheries such as Labrador and Newfoundland, a major research emphasis has been the attempt to understand the interaction between the people responsible for the Arctic Small Tool tradition and those responsible for the Maritime-thule, and the Indian tradition (Pitkethly 1972). Here the Arctic Small Tool tradition and Archaic traditions have maintained a remarkable distinctiveness that has allowed archaeologists to identify easily to which tradition his assemblages belong (Harp 1968, Tuck 1970). It is because of the extended synchrony of both of these traditions in the same region that the archaeologists have felt free to attach racial and linguistic affiliations to their artifact materials; few scholars, if any, have questioned this inference.

In the last few years a Canadian archaeologist has discovered new early Arctic Small Tool tradition sites on Devon and Dundos Islands in the Canadian high Arctic that have led him to postulate that the Arctic Small Tool tradition was actually a co-tradition alongside Pre-Dorset (McGhee 1976). McGhee's argument is that a comparison of artifact types of the two traditions at Port Refug
on Grinnell Peninsula, Devon Island, shows the traditions to be sufficiently distinct (though ultimately related to each other) to suggest that different populations were responsible. Particularly significant is the presence of two non-toggle harpoon heads in the Independence I related materials at Port Refuge, for according to McGhee (1976:18), "This trait, hinting at relationships to Siberian Neolithic or ancient northern Pacific cultures, serves to set the Independence people apart from other Eastern Arctic Paleo-Eskimo cultures, all of whom appear to have used toggling harpoons." He further suggests that as the Arctic Small Tool tradition people were settling the High Arctic, a second population—the Pre-Dorset people—spread eastward across the Low Arctic. Then, some time around 3700 B.P. the Pre-Dorset people expanded northward and replaced the Arctic Small Tool tradition people. It was these Pre-Dorset people who later developed Dorset culture. Although McGhee calls these cultures Paleo-Eskimo, he regards neither Pre-Dorset nor any of the other pre-Thule cultures in the eastern North American Arctic as a marker of Eskimo people or language.

Because the Port Refuge finds are so new, it is difficult to assess the degree to which the two views concerning Arctic Small Tool tradition and Pre-Dorset relationships in the eastern North American Arctic (i.e., are they one or two traditions and people) might be reconciled. On one hand, according to photographs, the Pre-Dorset artifacts from Port Refuge do appear appreciably from the usual Arctic Small Tool tradition finds in the High Arctic. On the other hand Pre-Dorset finds at Port Refuge are more recent than Independence I, so that the determination of whether the differences are due to repeated outside influences or an essentially continuous culture and people or an indication of a cultural tradition and population replacement (with some continuity of local artifact styles) again rests on the excavator's assessment of how much change in a local sequence he can tolerate before he invokes migration as an explanation. Again, since such an assessment is a matter of opinion, not something that can be verified by the kinds of evidence now extant for the region, inferences of this sort seem to me to be unwarranted and their arguments unproductive.

In the western regions of North America the role of Arctic Small Tool tradition in the development of Eskimo culture has undergone a similar reassessment. According to the common line of argument, the Denbigh Flint Complex, the earliest of the western Arctic Small Tool tradition phases, is seen as ancestral Paleo-Eskimo, and in consequence ancestral to Eskimo culture as a whole. Much of the rationale for this view has come from the postulated archaeological links of the Denbigh Flint Complex to Choris and of Choris to Norton, in a linear succession of in situ cultural development (Giddings 1960, Anderson 1968).

Recently, however, questions have arisen concerning the relationship of the three post-Denbigh complexes (Choris, Norton and Ipiutak) to the Denbigh Flint Complex, for obviously if any could have been derived from a non-Denbigh Flint Complex culture then the Denbigh Flint Complex—or Arctic Small Tool Tradition—would no longer be in direct line of Eskimo development.

The most serious challenge to the traditional view is the possible lack of continuity between Choris and Denbigh. Anderson (1972) has been foremost in stressing continuity, arguing on the basis of a series of transitional sites in northwestern Alaska that contain both diagnostic Denbigh Flint Complex artifacts (such as Denbigh Flint Complex burins; Arctic Small Tool tradition end- and side-blade insets; microblades, in some cases) and typical Choris traits (such as pottery, Choris style scrapers, and burin spell cores). The continuity is also stratigraphically suggested; at both Cape Krusenstiern and Onig Island there are successional cultural horizons from Denbigh Flint Complex to Choris, the latter with traits referable to the former. More recently, additional transitional sites, called pottery Denbigh Flint Complex, have been located at Walakpa (Stanford, personal communication), and along the North Slope (Dixon 1971); the fact of at least some continuity between the Denbigh Flint Complex and Choris seems inescapable. A question remains, however, about the degree of relationship of these so-called early Choris sites with the Choris type site, which occurs late in the sequence established by Giddings (1965) and Anderson (1968). Without going into detail, I regard the evidence as indicating continuity, while others, for example Clark (1976) and McGhee (n.d.) do not.

The second challenge to the view of the Arctic Small Tool tradition as Paleo-Eskimo is the interpretation of Norton as unrelated to other cultures within the tradition. To most archaeologists Norton is seen as pivotal in the development of Eskimo culture—nearly all scholars agree that it represents an early form of Eskimo culture. Because of its more southerly distribution and obvious influence of early cultural developments of southern Alaska and beyond (especially slate grinding) the question is basically whether Norton is derived from the Arctic Small Tool tradition or from some more southerly tradition. According to Dumond, who has had the greatest experience with the southern Norton sites, Norton, dating between 2100 and 1000 years ago, represents the indigenous
development of the Arctic Small Tool tradition peoples who had entered southwestern Alaska about 3000 years ago (Dumond 1971; Dumond, Henn and Stuckenrath, 1975). The people of this Arctic Small Tool tradition-derived Norton tradition developed a culture that included open water sea mammal hunting and many ideas derived from the Pacific coast of Alaska. The increased populations, made possible by technological and organizational developments, spread northward. In this scheme Choris is seen as a local northern development of this Norton tradition. According to Dumond the link, then, between the Arctic Small Tool tradition and Norton is to be found in the south, first as a result of a migration of Arctic Small Tool tradition Eskimos to the Alaskan Peninsula, then as a subsequent development of Norton tradition in that region; and finally as a population expansion northward to northwestern Alaska (Dumond 1972).

Clark disputes the judgement that Norton is directly related to the Arctic Small Tool tradition (1976). Rather, he sees Norton as a southern development of the Kachemak tradition of the Pacific Coast, which itself was a development of the Ocean Bay tradition. According to this viewpoint, many of the elements of Norton, and Choris, including "archaic-looking toggle harpoon heads, early style non-toggling harpoon heads, engraving tool handle, beaver incisor bits, small flat adzes, smaller chisels [burins?], numerous notched pebbles, boulder flake tools, labrets—even in an identical style, common preferences for materials of adornment, stone lamps, small pieces or pumice, a preferred abrasive stone, ground slate and labrets. But many of the other elements" are derived from the south (Clark 1976:16). An inspection of the evidence does not clarify the matter satisfactorily. Dumond is entirely correct in pointing out, on one hand, the Arctic Small Tool tradition nature of the 3900 B.P. assemblages on Alaska Peninsula, and on the other, the Norton relationship of the later Brooks River materials. However, Clark has identified artifact categories that indisputably have a long history in the southwestern area of Pacific Alaska—particularly ground slate and labrets. But many of the other categories are not that well dated in the non-Arctic Small Tool tradition pre-Norton cultures in the south and some categories, such as organic artifacts, cannot be fairly compared since they have not yet been found in pre-Choris levels in the north. Therefore, the relative dating of these elements in the north and south is equivocal.

Although to most archaeologists the relationships between the Denbigh Flint Complex and Norton seem clear cut (Giddings 1964), it is nevertheless also true that a temporal gap exists between the Denbigh Flint Complex and Norton in the area of the Norton type site, where Choris does not appear at all. But despite the great amount of work already done around Norton Sound andeward Peninsual I feel that there may yet be found transitional Denbigh Flint Complex/Norton complexes. The gap that seems to exist there may be more apparent than real—a result of ascribing all finds to either one of the two ideal cultural types and horizons.

PACIFIC TRADITIONS AND THE QUESTION OF ESKIMO ORIGINS

Some of the most interesting recent views on the development of Eskimo cultures are found in Clark's paper prepared for the Third Alaska Anthropological Association Conference in 1976. As a result of his extensive research on the Pacific side of the Alaska Peninsula and on Kodiak Island, he has constructed a long sequence of continuous cultural development from the Ocean Bay tradition (5500 to 4000 B.P.) to the three co-traditions of Kachemak Bay (3500 to 1000 B.P.), Western Peninsual tradition (Norton related), and Taki Birch. Because of this local continuity and because he can at times trace the spread of certain artifact types northward, he believes that the origins of Eskimos themselves are to be sought in the Pacific area of Alaska. According to this argument, Pacific Alaska is the area where Eskimo populations, after having diverged from Aleuts, developed their open water oriented culture. Further, one can trace the spread of this archaeological tradition first northward across the Alaska Peninsula during the Taki Birch period and then farther north during the Norton period. In each case it was the Eskimo population, racial and linguistic, that spread and replaced other indigenous peoples who have no longer survived. Although these early Eskimos adopted a few of the local styles, they remained, by and large, culturally distinct.

Since Clark's paper has not yet been published, I have not yet heard of any replies to it. I myself think that Clark overemphasizes the dissimilarities between the Denbigh Flint Complex, coastal Choris, and Norton and overemphasizes the cultural continuities between pre-Norton complexes in southwestern Alaska and Norton. Part of the problem lies in ascribing culture historical significance to similar chipped stone artifact styles, the grinding of slate, the presence or absence of pottery, the derivation of organic artifact styles (when many assemblages lack the required preservation for recovery),
and particular life styles. In my opinion, since we do not yet have adequate methods or theories to deal with even the basic problems of cultural history, trying to reconstruct population or linguistic history on the basis of archaeological evidence is not likely to be fruitful.

THE REMOTE ANCESTRY OF ESKIMOS

The earliest period of concern is the time of Aleut and Eskimo separation. I can say at the outset that as yet we have no archaeological evidence of an Eskaleutian population (a population hypothesized on the basis of linguistics). The separation between Eskimos and Aleuts—if that is the proper way to look at the complex human behavior that was undoubtedly involved—must have occurred prior to the earliest archaeological evidence in the north, i.e., before 11,000 \pm 1000 years ago—

I am excepting from the discussion here the Old Crow Flats finds (Irving 1975) and the early Trail Creek Cave finds (Larsen 1968). The reason for this conclusion is that there are few cultural links between the earliest Alaskan mainland and Aleutian Island archaeological materials and, further, that present evidence from the Aleutian islands points to a long period of Aleut cultural (and presumably racial and linguistic) development there (Laughlin 1966; Aigner et al. 1971, 1976). From the Aleut perspective there is no reason to derive any of the archaeology of the Aleutians from elsewhere, particularly in view of the fact that continuing excavations on Umnak Island are rapidly closing the often referred to hiatus that once existed between Anangula and the initial period of deposits of the Chaluka Midden (Aigner et al. 1976).

Excavations of Ugashak Narrows at the eastern end of Alaska Peninsula, other sites on the Pacific side of the Alaska Peninsula (Takli Alder period), and on Kodiak Island (Ocean Bay 7) reveal complexes that are not at all in the line of Aleut cultural continuity. Most important in this respect is the presence of bifacially flaked artifacts and microblades at Ugashak Narrows that are classed by Dumond as American Paleo-Arctic (1976). Dumond interprets the presence of these artifacts as an indication of the existence in Alaska, 9000 to 10,000 years ago, of a widespread interior tradition that was distinct from the tradition represented by Anangula. He feels that it could probably be ascribed to groups that later became Eskimo and Indian. I would agree with this statement if it were phrased somewhat differently. 9000 to 10,000 years ago is so remote a time that one would be hard pressed to distinguish any single cultural line of continuity to the present, much less any genetic or linguistic strain. My own opinion is that as whenever we archaeologists have only artifactual data, without skeletal evidence as well, we had better concentrate on resolving technological developments—a pursuit that has always been basic to culture history in the Arctic (Levin 1960, Giddings 1952, Collins 1937)—and free ourselves from population or linguistic interpretations. To this end we must approach the question with two aims: one of these is the attempt to connect as far as possible the lines of indigenous development of technology and to elucidate the spatial data that can shed light on social organization; the other is the examination of the geographical distribution of various traits through time. When we develop techniques to communicate these findings to our colleagues in such a way that our colleagues can verify them, then we shall be able to contribute meaningfully to the culture history of the Arctic and, more importantly, shall have the kinds of results that allow us to ask the more dynamic question of why cultural changes occurred. To phrase our results in a metaphor of linguistic or racial history is to lessen the validity of our conclusions and to relegate our findings to the back shelf of outmoded archaeological thought.

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Anderson: Prehistoric Eskimo Culture


1965


Morlan, R. E.

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Tuck, J. A.
IMPORTANT NOTE FROM THE EDITORIAL ASSISTANT:

During the production of this issue I have been unable to establish contact with the symposium editor. In consequence I have been forced to make many editorial decisions which in other circumstances would have been made by Dr. Michael. Unfortunately, some major problems have been the result.

Due to a comedy of errors beyond my control I have just now, in the final stages of publication, received correspondence written months ago by the symposium editor. In it he indicated that the order of the papers was to be as follows:

1) MacNeish
2) Alekseyev
3) Laughlin
4) Arutyunov
5) Anderson
6) Gurvich
7) Burch
8) Bromley
9) Goodenough

Further, he asked me to eliminate Fig.1 from Douglas Anderson's paper, as the author now feels that the table is not up to date. Unfortunately, I am not able to do this, as it would entail further production delays. The corrected text of Dr. Anderson's paper should read: "Summarized below is a brief outline of the archaeological complexes in question. These summaries are a distillation of the various interpretive schemes as presented by those archaeologists . . . ."

My apologies to the authors.

Glenda Denniston